

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An apparatus comprising:
 - a first stamp to apply pressure to a mold at a first portion of the mold; and
 - a second stamp to apply pressure to the mold at a second portion of the mold that
- 5 is adjacent to the first portion of the mold.
2. The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising a third stamp to apply pressure to the mold at a third portion of the mold that is adjacent to the second portion of the mold.
3. The apparatus of claim 2, further comprising a fourth stamp to apply pressure to the mold at a fourth portion of the mold that is adjacent to the third portion of the mold.
- 10 4. The apparatus of claim 2, wherein the second portion of the mold substantially surrounds the first portion of the mold and the third portion of the mold substantially surrounds the second portion of the mold.
5. The apparatus of claim 4, wherein the first stamp has a substantially circular footprint, the second stamp has a substantially annular footprint, and the third stamp has a
- 15 substantially annular footprint.
6. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the first stamp includes a step that extends from a side of the first stamp, and the second stamp includes an overhang that extends from a side of the second stamp, the overhang of the second stamp being positioned to contact from above the step of the first stamp.

7. The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising:

a control that is operative to cause the first stamp to apply pressure to the first portion of the mold before causing the second stamp to apply pressure to the second portion of the mold.

5 8. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the mold is a microtool.

9. A method comprising:

applying pressure to a mold at a first portion of the mold without applying pressure to the mold at a second portion of the mold that is adjacent to the first portion of the mold; and

10 after commencing to apply pressure to the mold at the first portion of the mold, applying pressure to the mold at the second portion of the mold.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein pressure is initially applied to the second portion of the mold without applying pressure to the mold at a third portion of the mold that is adjacent to the second portion of the mold;

15 and further comprising:

after commencing to apply pressure to the mold at the second portion of the mold, applying pressure to the mold at the third portion of the mold.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein pressure is initially applied to the third portion of the mold without applying pressure to the mold at a fourth portion of the mold that is adjacent to the third portion of the mold;

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and further comprising:

after commencing to apply pressure to the mold at the third portion of the mold, applying pressure to the mold at a fourth portion of the mold.

12. The method of claim 10, wherein the second portion of the mold substantially surrounds the first portion of the mold and the third portion of the mold substantially
5 surrounds the second portion of the mold.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the first portion of the mold is substantially circular, the second portion of the mold is substantially annular, and the third portion of the mold is substantially annular.

14. An apparatus comprising:
10 first means for applying pressure to a mold at a first portion of the mold without applying pressure to the mold at a second portion of the mold that is adjacent to the first portion of the mold; and
second means for applying pressure to the mold at the second portion of the mold.

15. The apparatus of claim 14, wherein the second means is configured to apply pressure
15 to the mold at the second portion of the mold without applying pressure to the mold at a third portion of the mold that is adjacent to the second portion of the mold;

and further comprising:

third means for applying pressure to the third portion of the mold.

16. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein the third means is configured to apply pressure to the mold at the third portion of the mold without applying pressure to the mold at a fourth portion of the mold that is adjacent to the third portion of the mold;

and further comprising:

5 fourth means for applying pressure to the fourth portion of the mold.

17. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein the second portion of the mold substantially surrounds the first portion of the mold and the third portion of the mold substantially surrounds the second portion of the mold.

18. The apparatus of claim 17, wherein:

10 the first means includes a first stamp that has a substantially circular footprint;

 the second means includes a second stamp that has a substantially annular footprint; and

 the third means includes a third stamp that has a substantially annular footprint.

19. The apparatus of claim 15, further comprising:

15 control means, coupled to the first, second and third means, for sequentially controlling the first, second and third means to:

 downwardly actuate the first means;

 downwardly actuate the second means after downwardly actuating the first means; and

20 downwardly actuate the third means after downwardly actuating the second means.

20. The apparatus of claim 14, wherein the first means includes a first stamp that has a step that extends from a side of the first stamp, and the second means includes a second stamp that has an overhang that extends from a side of the second stamp, the overhang of the second stamp being positioned to contact from above the step of the first stamp.